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## GOOD AND BAD MOTHERS.

BY MRS. AMELIA E. BARR.

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THE difference between good and bad mothers is so vast and so far-reaching that it is no exaggeration to say that the good mothers of this generation are building the homes of the next generation, and that the bad mothers are building the prisons. For out of families nations are made ; and if the father be the head and the hands of a family, the mother is the heart. No office in the world is so honorable as hers, no priesthood so holy, no influence so sweet and strong and lasting.

For this tremendous responsibility mother-love has always been sufficient. The most ignorant women have trusted to it ; and the most learned have found it potential when all their theories failed. And neither sage men nor wise women will ever devise anything to take the place of mother-love in the rearing of children. If there be other good things present, it glorifies them ; if there be no other good thing—it is sufficient. For mother-love is the spirit of self-sacrifice even unto death, and self-sacrifice is the meat and drink of all true and pure affection.

Still this momentous condition supposes some central influence, some obligation, on the child's part which will reciprocate it ; and this central influence is found to be in *obedience*. There was once a child in Jewry who was called “wonderful,” and yet the most significant fact recorded of his boyhood is, that he “was subject unto his parents.” Indeed nothing else is told of the child, and we are left to conclude that in the pregnant fact of his boyish obedience lay the secret of his future perfect manhood. Unselfish love in the mother ! cheerful obedience in the children ! in whatever home these forces are constantly operative, that home can not be a failure. And mother-love is not of the

right kind, nor of the highest trend, unless it compels this obedience.

The assertion that affectionate firmness and even wholesome chastisement is unnecessary with our advanced civilization is a specious and dangerous one. The children of to-day have as many rudimentary vices as they had in the days of the patriarchs; as a general thing they are self-willed and inclined to evil from their cradles; greedy without a blush, and ready to lie as soon as they discover the use of language. A good mother does not shut her eyes to these facts; she accepts her child as imperfect, and trains it with never-ceasing love and care for its highest duties. She does not call impudence "smartness," nor insubordination "high spirit," nor selfishness "knowing how to take care of itself," nor lying and dishonesty "sharpness." She knows if the child is to be father to the man, what kind of a man such a child will make.

How to manage young children; how to strengthen them physically; how best to awaken their intellects, engage their affections and win their confidence; how to make home the sweetest spot on earth, a place of love, order and repose, a temple of purity where innocence is respected, and where no one is permitted to talk of indecent subjects or to read indecent books; these are the duties of a good mother: and her position, if so filled, is one of dignity and grave importance. For it is on the hearthstone she gives the fine healthy initial touch to her sons and daughters that is not effaced through life, and that makes them blessed in their generation.

There is another duty, a very sacred one, which some mothers, however good in all other respects, either thoughtlessly or with mistaken ideas, delegate to others—the religious training of their children. No Sunday-School and no Church can do it for them. The child that learns "Our Father" at its mother's knee; that hears from mother's lips the heroic and tender stories of the Bible, has a well spring of religious faith in his soul that no after life, however hard and fast and destructive, can dry up. It is inconceivable then how a mother can permit any other woman to deprive her of an influence over her children nothing can destroy; of a memory in their lives so sweet, that when every other memory is withered and approaching decay, it will still be fresh and green; yes, even to the grave's mouth. Family!

Country ! Humanity ! these three, but the greatest of the three is Family ; and the heart of the family is the good mother. Happy the children who have one ! With them

“ faith in womankind  
Beats with their blood, and trust in all things high  
Comes easy to them.”

But if the grand essential to a good mother be self-denying, self-effacing love, this is a bad era for its development. Selfishness and self-seeking is the spirit of the time, and its chilling poison has infected womanhood, and touched even the sacred principle of maternity. In some women it assumes the form of a duty. They feel their own mental culture to be of supreme importance, they wish to attend lectures and take lessons, and give themselves to some special study. Or the enslaved condition of their own sex troubles them ; they bear on their minds the oppressed shop girls of America, or the secluded Odaliskues in some Eastern seraglio, or they have ecclesiastic proclivities and take the chair at church meetings, or political ones and deliver lectures before their special club on women's disabilities. In these and many other ways they put the natural mission of womanhood aside as an animal instinct, not conducive to their mental development.

Now, no one will object to women's devoting themselves to works of religion and charity ; but this devotion should come before marriage. If they have assumed the position of wifehood, it is a monstrous thing to hold themselves degraded by its consequences ; or to consider the care of children a waste of their own life. The world can do without learned women, but it cannot do without good wives and mothers ; and when married women prefer to be social ornaments and intellectual amateurs, they may be called philanthropists and scholars, but they are nevertheless moral failures, and bad mothers.

Society has put maternity out of fashion also, and considering the average society woman, it is perhaps just as well. No children are more forlorn and more to be pitied than the waifs of the woman whose life is given up to what she calls “ pleasure.” Humbler-born babies are nursed at their mother's breast and cradled in her loving arms. She teaches them to walk and to read. In all their pain she soothes them ; in all their joys she has a part ; in all their wrongs “ mother ” is an ever-present help and com-

forter. The child of the fashionable woman is too often committed at once to the care of some stranger, who for a few dollars a month is expected to perform the mother's duty for her. If it does not suck the vitiated, probably diseased, milk of some peasant, it has the bottle and india-rubber mouth piece, when the woman in charge chooses to give it. But she is often in a temper, or sleepy, or the milk is not prepared, or she is in the midst of a comfortable gossip, or she is dressing or feeding herself, and it is not to be expected she will put any sixteen-dollar-a-month baby before her own comfort or pleasure.

The child cannot complain of hunger, it can only cry, and very likely may be struck for crying. What these neglected little ones suffer from thirst is a matter painful to inquire into. The nurse accustomed to drink her tea and her beer at all hours does not herself patronize cold water, and she never imagines the child needs it. Many a baby after being tortured for hours with a feverish consuming thirst passes into the doctor's hands before the trouble is recognized. But if the child's own mother had been nursing it she would not have been long in finding out the cause of its impatient, urgent fretfulness.

Let any tender-hearted woman go into the parks and watch one of these unhappy children in the care of its nurse. The hot sun beats down on the small upturned face, and the ignorant creature in charge goes on with her flirtation, or her gossip, or her novel. The child may be at shrieking point from lying long in one position, but there is no one to comprehend its necessity. During those awful hours in which its teeth force their way through hot and swollen gums—hours which would bring from adults unwriteable exclamations—the forsaken little sufferer is at the mercy of some sleepy, self-indulgent woman, who has no love for it. Why, indeed, should she? If it were a matter of catechism, how many educated women would be capable of nursing good-naturedly for weeks a fretful, sick child not their own?

As for these neglected babies of pleasure-seeking women, they suffer terribly, but then their mothers are having what they consider a perfectly lovely time, posing at the opera or gyrating in some ballroom, exquisitely dressed, and laughing as lightly as if there were no painful echoes from their neglected nurseries. For no nurse is apt to complain of her baby, she knows her business

and her interest too well for that ; she prefers to speak comfortable words, and vows the "little darling grows better and better every hour, God bless it !" and, so assured, the mother goes airily away, telling herself that her nurse is a perfect treasure. Whatever other nurses may do, she knows that her nurse is reliable. The fact is, that even where there are children in a nursery able to complain of the wrongs and cruelties they have to endure they very seldom dare to do so. Mamma is a dear, beautiful lady, very far off ; nurse is an ever-present power, capable of making them suffer still more. And mamma does not like to hear tales, she always appears annoyed at anything against nurse. They look into their mother's face with eyes full of their sad story, if she only had the heart to understand ; but they dare not speak, and very soon they are remanded back to their cruel keeper with a kiss, and an injunction to "be good, and do as nurse tells them."

Consider the women to whom this class of mothers delegate their high office—an office for which hardly any love or wisdom is sufficient. It would scarcely be possible in the whole world to find any persons more unfit for it. Taking this class as a whole, these very mothers are never tired of expatiating upon its gross immorality, deceitfulness, greed and dishonesty ; yet they do not hesitate to leave the very lives of their children in the charge of these women, whose first lessons to them are lying and deceit. It is a hideous system, and how hideous must that life called "pleasure" be, that can thus put aside love, reason, conscience, and break to pieces a natural law so strong that in its purity it frequently proves more powerful than the law of self-preservation. Writing on this subject, Frederick James Grant, F. R. C. S., in his bold and original book, *From Our Dead Selves*, tells of a fashionable mother who put her first child out to nurse, and who, when her second died at birth and was brought to her bedside in its coffin, was entirely interested—not in the child—but in the pretty lining and covering of the coffin. For it is one of the startling facts of this condition of motherhood that the poor infant left to some dreadful shrew, body and soul, has the very best care taken of its frills and coats and of the wraps in its baby carriage. For these things will be seen by other people's servants and commented on, and are therefore worthy of attention.

It is a strange state of society which tolerates this awful transfer of duty, and society will have the bill to pay as well as the

cruel mother. These neglected children, whatever their birth, come really from the dangerous classes, and have a likelihood to drift there. For the first moral training of a child is the most important of all, and in these cases it is given by women gross both through ignorance and vice ; whose relatives are very likely at the same time living in suspicious localities, or in prison wards. And, naturally enough, their first lessons to the children under them are to lie, to deceive, to commit small pilferings and not be found out. They are ordered not to carry tales out of the nursery, or let mamma know what nurse does not want known. Bad language, bad habits, hatred, petty conciliations, meanness of every kind, are in the curriculum of any nursery left in the care of the women usually found in them.

No one need imagine that the evil thus wrought can be eradicated in future years by a higher class of teachers. The vicious seed is sown ; it is next to impossible to go through the field of a child's mind and gather it up again. It has taken root, and unless it can be crowded out by a nobler growth, the harvest is certain. The mother then who prefers pleasure and society to her children, whom she hands over to wicked and cruel nurses, is herself wicked and cruel. She may stand before the world as the personification of refinement and delicacy and elegance, but she is really no better than her substitute ; and she has no right to expect that her children will be better. In some favorable cases there may come a redeeming power in future years, but in the main they will drift downward to their first moral impressions ; and when they have become bad and unhappy men and women, they will not scruple to say " from our mother cometh our misery." These are hard truths, yet one-half has not been told. For if it were not for the abounding number of good mothers both rich and poor, this class of women would undermine all virtue, and everything lovely and of good report.

There was once an idea that mothers were the antiseptic quality in society, that they preserved its moral tone, by insisting that the language used and the subjects discussed before them should be such as were suitable for virtuous women. But there is one kind of bad mother to whom questionable subjects seem highly suitable. She discusses them without reserve in the presence of her daughters, and she makes her drawing room the forum for women with queer domestic views, for " Physical Cul-

ture" women, and such-like characters. The things our grandmothers went down to their graves without knowing she talks about in unmistakable terms before unmarried girls. A certain mother who boldly defended her opinion that "girls should not be kept ignorant as a means for keeping them innocent," permitted her own daughter to be present during all the unsavory scandal of *Vanity Fair*. The child learned to watch with interest the doings of women of many seasons, and to listen with composure to very questionable stories. Before she was twelve years old she had become suspicious of the conduct of every woman, and when her teacher one day asked her "Who was Moses?" she answered promptly "The son of Pharoah's daughter." "Not the son," corrected the teacher, "the adopted son. Pharoah's daughter found him in the river Nile." "*So* she said," replied this premature woman; suspicious of women's actions and a ready assumption of the very worst motives for them, being the lessons she had deduced from knowledge imparted before mind and experience were capable of receiving it.

It is often said that "ignorance is not innocence." True, but neither is knowledge innocence; it is most frequently the first step of guiltiness. What good can come of little children knowing the things which belong to maturity? Is any girl sweeter or even safer for knowing about the undercurrent of filth below the glittering crust of gilded society. The Chinese quarter is a fact, yet is there a mother who would like her daughter to visit it? But if it is not fit to visit, it is not fit to talk about. No one is ever the better for knowing of evil, unless they can do something to remedy it.

A good mother will shield her children from the consequences of their own ignorance, physical and moral, and she will just as carefully shield them from knowledge which is hurtful because premature; just as fruit green and unripe is hurtful. And no guardianship is too close for this end. Mothers will generally admit this fact as regards the children of other people, but as to their own brood they cradle themselves in a generous belief of its incorruptibility. Their girls would never do as other girls do; and their girls are consequently permitted a license which they would think dangerous for any but their own daughters. Then some day there is a paragraph in one of the papers and the men blame the man, and the women blame the girl, and all the time the



mother is probably the guiltiest of the parties. She has stimulated her daughter's imagination in childhood, she has left her to the choice of her companions in youth, she has trusted her sacred duty to circumstances, she has indulged a vague hope concerning the honor and virtue of humanity, and thus satisfied her indolent neglect. But what right had she to expect that men would revere the treasure she herself left unguarded ?

For there has been no special race made for this era ; what Adam, Jacob, Samson and David were ; what Eve, Sarah, Rachel, Jael and Bathsheba were, the men and women of to-day are, in all their essentials. Circumstances only have made them to differ ; and nature laughs at circumstances, and goes back at any crisis to her first principles. Indeed, the good mother of to-day, instead of relaxing, must increase her care over her children. For never since the world began has youth been so catered to, never has it been surrounded by so many open temptations, never so much flattered, and yet at the same time never have the reins of discipline been so far relaxed. Now the spirit we evoke we must control, or else we must become its slave. If we are no longer to reverence the grey hairs of age ; if young men are to drive the chariot of the sun, and young women are to be allowed to strip the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil, then it is high time some system of education was invented which will put old heads upon young shoulders. Alas, this can never be, for education is a long and composite process, made up of home influences, surrounding circumstances, and early associations. When books and schools and teachers shall have done all they possibly can, high above every Gamaliel will sit the good mother ; the first influence, the first teacher, the first friend and the last.

AMELIA E. BARR.